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THE PRESENT STATUS OF WOMAN'S EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL APPLICATION TO A BETTER NURSING EDUCATION¹

BY DR. BRANDT V. B. DIXON

President H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, Tulane University

The topic which I read as assigned to me is, What is the present status of woman's education in the preparation for trained nursing? I read in that question, practically this: What have the colleges of this country, especially those devoted to the training of women, to offer as an adequate preparation in education for the technical work in the special subjects for the training of nurses which is to come afterward?

I read in it also this thought, and if I am wrong you in your minds can correct me: I read in it a dissatisfaction with the present status of preliminary education among nurses themselves. I read in it a desire for such training as shall introduce nurses into the field of culture and intellectual refinement and preparation to meet the social and cultural relations forced upon them in their profession, such as will render them equal to emergencies as they arise, ready to undertake the unexpected affairs as they occur in their experience. In other words, I read in it a desire on the part of the nurses themselves to so prepare themselves for the emergencies of life that they will not be merely the trained experts, taught to perform certain tricks deftly, securely and wisely, but to meet people as human beings on their own level, their equals in culture, in refinement, in all those tastes, sentiments, feelings, which go to make up a splendid, cultivated womanhood; equal to meet the emergencies of life, whatever character they may assume.

I once heard a speaker in a medical association make this remark: that there were places in this country where a physician would not be employed unless he were not only an expert in his profession but able to discuss Browning with intelligence and appreciation. Now while that is told somewhat as a joke, there lies behind it a great truth. We take the measure of people, not from the standpoint of expertness, not from the standpoint of skill or efficiency, but from the standpoint of a broad, trained humanity. We deal with them as cultivated people, our equals intellectually and emotionally; trained in their sympathy; trained

¹ Address at a public meeting of the National League of Nursing Education, New Orleans, La., May 2, 1916, taken from the stenographer's notes of the session.

in their appreciation of noble ideas, ready to meet us as equals outside of their specialty as well as to prove their efficiency within it.

Now I believe another feeling and perhaps a distinct sentiment underlies this question. There is a feeling that no specialty can attain great proficiency, that no medium or narrow training can attain the highest excellence, unless it is built upon a broad foundation of large culture. An artist who merely learns to paint or to carve never attains the excellence which would be profitable to him had he, in addition to his skill, such a keen insight into the broader relations, into the finer human sensibilities, into the larger and nobler ideals of life which belong to the cultivated or trained man or woman. And so in another way I do not believe the physician or the surgeon or the nurse can possibly reach the efficiency in his own specialty which would be possible if that specialty were placed upon a broad, fine, humane training.

It has been said that some of the states require at least one year of high school training. I do not know a sadder commentary on the intelligence of a legislature which makes the preparation so low. They must have a very unsatisfactory appreciation of the duties and possibilities of the nursing profession. There was a time when the medical schools in this country would receive people into their classes who had no high school training at all. After a long and somewhat severe struggle it is now, I believe, a requirement in every high grade medical college that they shall have at least a high school training and one or two years of pre-medical training, practically a junior college course, before they can be admitted into full standing. That precisely is what in my judgment is necessary for the preparation for any vocation which aims to be a profession.

Now why? I have studied girls a great many years. I have watched their development, mentally as well as physically, with a great deal of sympathy and interest; and while the conclusions that I have drawn may not be final, even to myself, and may not bear an extremely critical analysis, yet I believe on the whole they are just and reasonable.

In early life girls, more often than boys, but all children, are or should be subject to unquestionable authority. They grow up under authoritative direction and this authority is maintained much longer with girls than it is with boys. Through the grammar school grades obedience is the great principle. When they come to high school years, the individual principle asserts itself, especially in boys, and because teachers in high schools do not appreciate this moral transformation which takes place in a young man, boys all over this country leave the high schools because they resent the imposition of a moral principle which is not suited to their expanding temperament.

What is the new principle which supplants the old one of direct obedience to authority? It is that of loyalty. The boy or the girl who enters a high school at the age of fourteen or fifteen years acquires a new outlook upon life and upon his relation to his fellows. Boys acquire it, through their independent temperament, rather earlier than girls, and this spirit of loyalty, following leaders, the choosing of some one person to whom they shall devote themselves, is a principle which is ignored very largely in our education. It is not until after high school graduation that a new principle again establishes itself in the growing mind of the young, and that is the principle of personal ideals. Between the ages of eighteen, or in some cases earlier, say sixteen or seventeen, and about twenty, there is a great expanding mental development. It is the rise and struggle of these ideals in the minds of the young person; and this is the most precious period in the life of any student or in the life of any young woman; because it is precisely there that she is to acquire that independence of judgment, that freedom and self-assertion, coupled with responsibility, which make college life so attractive and so dear to their young minds, if it is properly administered and if it recognizes this principle of free judgment and free expanding power as the one controlling ideal of their lives.

Now right there, if we are to have self-developing women in the profession, is the most important training period in their whole career; and for that reason, if for no other, if the nursing profession is to be a great profession, recognized as such by yourselves and by the community at large, right there is to be the educational training which is to become most valuable. Of course there are many who are driven into the profession by reasons that are compelling. They must make a living, they must go on and achieve for themselves physical independence, special conditions demand it of them, but so far as it is possible for them to do so, they should never sacrifice those two precious years of what would be called a junior college life. In those years should be given the most valuable pre-technical training, training which should broaden their sensibilities, enlarge their sympathies, ennoble their ideals and expand their spiritual consciousness, give them a clear vision of life, give them a better human relationship to all that is noble and fine that has gone before. And it is right there that they meet men and women, associates of the highest and finest culture, and so develop their lives into greater and better possibilities for the future. Now in those two years, also, it is possible to introduce an intellectual training which would be most advantageous later on, a little science, a little cultivation of habits of observation, of keen induction and deduction, maybe taught to pupils of high school years, but as yet they have not had enough in-

centive, that deep, strong motive, to search out things for themselves, that consciousness of personal worth and of personal value which come to the young woman at about the age of eighteen, that application which is true at that period of life; and it is just there that whatever they do is appropriated and taken into their inner consciousness in the most intimate and valuable way.

So, if I may be allowed to express merely personal opinions a little further, let me say that here there should be laid a basis of training and education which will be immensely valuable whether they go on into professional work or not; whether they are called upon to leave it for other vocations or not. They should have, first of all, a strong course in English; because in English we can give such a training as will command, as will compel a recognition of culture, wherever the person uses it. We can give them an introduction to and an appreciation of the great minds that have contributed to the building up of our literature. We can give them a love of high and fine ideals, such as they will find expressed in our noblest writings. Thus we give them the possibility of self-development later on, such as they cannot get, or only the rare person can ever get, by basing it, if she must, upon a grammar school or a high school preparation.

In the next place, she should have a modicum of science: biology, not simply human physiology, but biology in its great modern and broader aspects, such as will teach the great life from nature as it is carried on in plants and animals, so that she will recognize later on, in her technical training, relations of all these matters to the great life of the world and come to see through her profession all those deeper and wider relations which are sustained by the great living universe; the chemistry of foods, especially in its relation to dietetics; domestic science; psychology as a preparation for mental hygiene, as a preparation of the understanding and the appreciation of human motives, human feelings, human sympathies; and perhaps, if it were possible, a foreign language. She needs all these broadening, remoulding sources or agencies which shall give her such an outlook upon life, such an orientation to humanity that she will never be daunted in the presence of new situations, so that she will be prepared to meet on an equal footing any of the people whom she may later on be called to meet, so that she may not only deserve but compel recognition as a skilled member of an advanced and worthy profession.

Now these things impress me as an educator; and I know that I have set the standard rather higher than is immediately possible in the present condition of education of nurses. But I believe in placing the standard so that, at least, in the future, we can work toward it and

can develop in all our activities a closer and closer approximation to that standard. When this standard has finally been set up, so that every training school for nurses shall require a junior college preparation for those who are admitted to it, you will find the finer, the better trained, the college graduate and perhaps the post-graduate students choosing a professional education as a trained nurse; and with the ever-widening and increasing advantages of that profession, with its wide range of activities, with its deeper and stronger call to service which is coming every year from a distressed humanity, with the fine appreciation on the part of humanity of the nobler work that it is doing there will come an increased desire for the best of our young women to enter the ranks.

Every age has its deep inspiring motive. There was, as you know, a great military age; then there came a great schoolmaster age, a scholastic age; then came a great industrial age, animated by the desire for wealth, for producing and distributing the products of its activities. But there has dawned now a higher motive; there is coming into this century, at least, a deep passion for humanity, a strong desire for the noblest and highest service; and I consider that it is to this profession that we are to look for the wisest and noblest and most helpful example of it all.

STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENTS FIGHTING CANCER

Among the many agencies now active in the campaign against cancer, several of the most progressive state boards of health are making notable efforts to spread the gospel of hope which is found in the early recognition of the danger signals of the disease and its prompt and competent treatment. The health authorities of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia and Idaho have been especially active in disseminating trustworthy information and advice about the prevention and cure of cancer.